

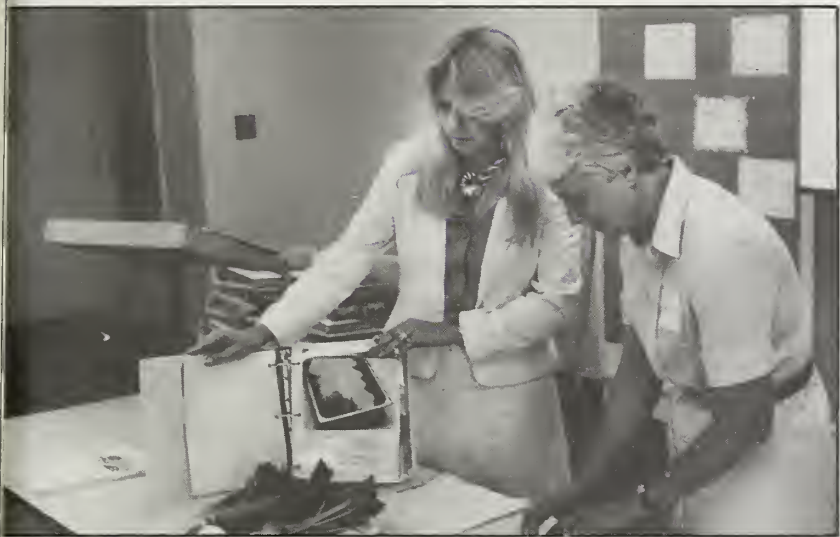
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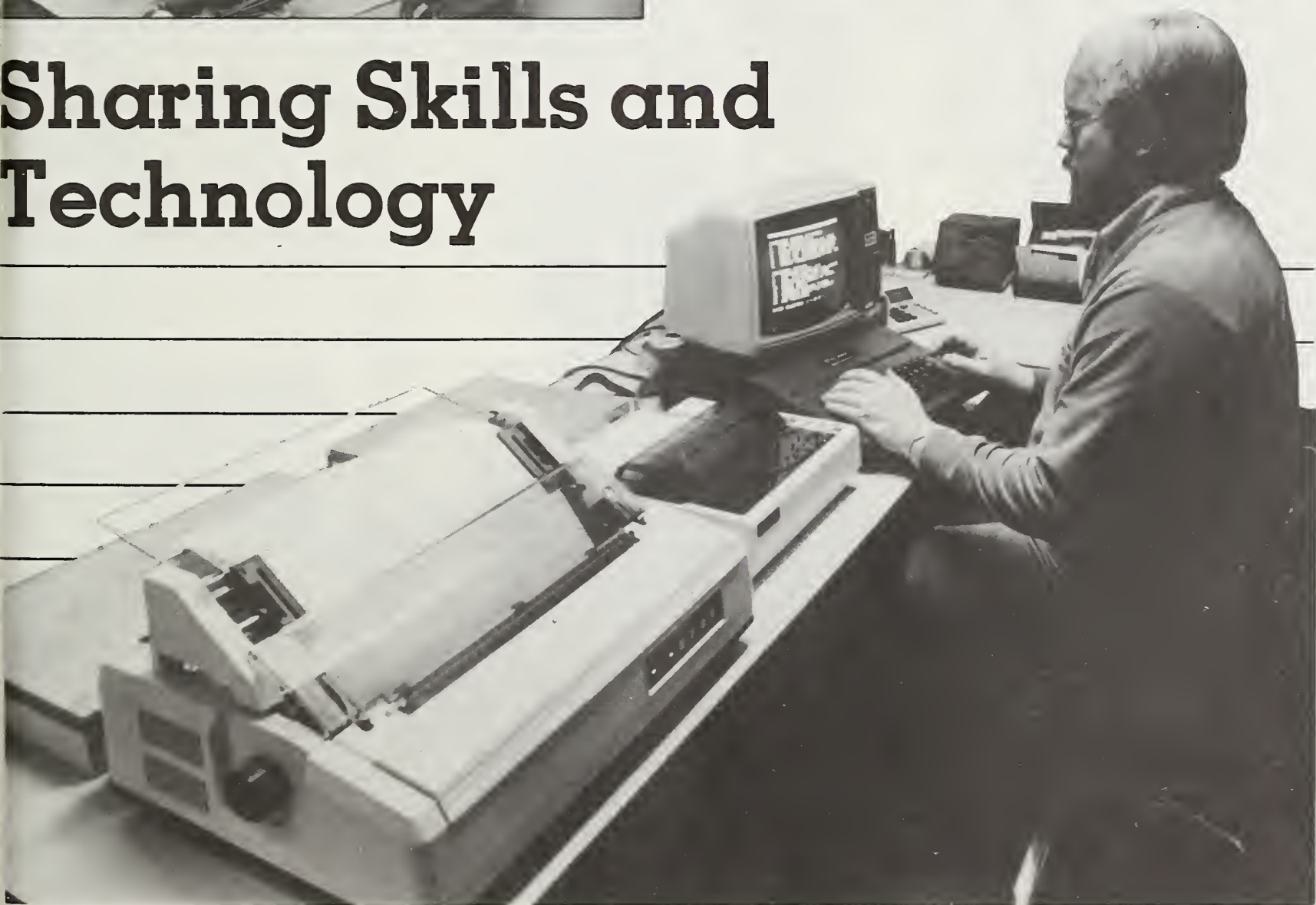
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Food & Nutrition

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Sharing Skills and Technology



New Directions in Technical Assistance

Providing guidance and technical assistance to state agencies administering the federal food assistance programs has always been an important part of the work of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

In recent years, this work has become increasingly important—and taken on some new directions—as food program managers at all levels have faced added pressures to use resources as efficiently and accountably as possible.

Often solutions to problems have involved using new technology. School food service managers, for example, have found they can save staff time as well as money by using computers to keep track of inventories, order food, figure meal costs, and do other tasks. Food stamp managers have cut down on certification errors by using computers to verify information in a fraction of the time required with manual systems.

But the solutions present problems of their own: How does a state or local food program manager know what kind of computer equipment to buy or how to program it? What's the best way to train staff and incorporate the new technology into day-to-day operations?

Sharing solutions to common problems

Bringing people together to share skills and information is a major component of the expanded technical assistance effort at FNS. "There are lots of people out there who have made significant improvements in their programs," says Lou Pastura, chief of the Special Operations Branch in FNS' Nutrition and Technical Services Division.

"Using computers is one example, but there are others as well. People have found ways to reduce school meal costs, for example, by buying cooperatively with other school districts. A number of states have cut the costs involved in shipping and storing USDA-donated foods.

"In the high-volume school lunch market," he adds, "individual savings which at first seem small can grow to substantial proportions."

In a variety of ways, FNS is encouraging state and local manag-

ers to learn from each other and to draw upon the expertise of people in the private sector.

In a project begun in 1980, the agency hired consultants to go in and work with state and local food distribution managers who requested help with their programs. By this past fall, more than 28 states had received help through the project, and many have made improvements that are saving them millions of dollars.

Alabama, one of the first states to request assistance, revamped its food distribution system, which basically had not been changed since the commodity program began in the 1930's. The changes are especially helpful to local school lunch managers, who can now order USDA-donated foods from central warehouses instead of having to spend hours picking up the food at railway stops.

FNS has also held conferences to bring food program managers together with experts in particular areas. This year, for example, FNS held seven food procurement and merchandising workshops to help school food service managers sharpen their food buying skills.

The workshops, which were held in various locations throughout the country, brought together experts from the private sector and all levels of government to discuss successful food purchasing and merchandising techniques.

Conferences have also helped Food Stamp Program managers improve their programs. Federal, state, and local food stamp managers have met in national as well as regional conferences to share ideas and information on ways to reduce waste and abuse and cut down on errors made during certification.

The conferences are part of a nationwide campaign called Operation Awareness, which is now in its second year. As part of Operation Awareness, FNS has developed a catalogue of state and local program improvement activities and a newsletter, which contains reports of successful activities at the state and local levels.

The agency has also initiated a state exchange project, which provides federal funds for state person-

nel to travel to other states so they can see first hand effective management techniques being used by other Food Stamp Program administrators.

Thanks to State Exchange, program managers in places like San Francisco and Fresno County, California, have found it easier to automate their food stamp issuance operations after visiting other areas with computer programs already in place.

Special help with computers

In a number of program areas, FNS is making special efforts to help state and local managers use computers in their programs. "This is an area we feel is really important," says Pastura. "In the past 5 years, there have been dramatic changes in the technology available to help managers run their programs.

"But because of the newness of this technology, there are not many managers who have the hands-on experience to adapt it to individual state and local program needs."

To help school food service managers computerize their lunch programs, FNS has combined resources with the American School Food Service Association (ASFSA) to collect and disseminate information on specific computer hardware, software, and applications being used by school districts throughout the country.

The purpose of this joint effort is to facilitate the exchange of information as well as specific software packages between schools with similar needs. It is expected to reduce the time schools need to develop and implement computer services, as well as the expense of software and programming.

FNS has set up a special unit, called the "technology transfer section," to encourage this kind of exchange. In addition to working with ASFSA on collecting and disseminating information on computers, the new section is making available microcomputer software for three model automated school food service systems.

Each of the model systems has components for processing applica-

tions for free and reduced-price meals, doing inventory control, and keeping track of participation and revenue.

For state and local managers who need to learn more about how to use these systems in their school lunch programs, the technology transfer section has a special week-long training program. (See article on page 4.)

"Technical assistance in the past has sometimes had a negative meaning to the states," says Mary Lou Wheeler, who heads the technology transfer section. "Through management evaluations and reviews, FNS pinpointed problem areas and then provided assistance, guidance, and support in these areas."

This assistance was generally as a result of the agency's findings and usually not at the request of the states, Wheeler explains. "Now we've focused our attention on areas where states feel assistance is needed," she says.

A closer look at some examples

On the following pages, we take a closer look at some of the new technical assistance and technology transfer initiatives. We have an article on the food procurement workshops, which tells how the workshops came about and what participants learned from them. We also have an article on the computer training project for school food service program managers.

Because our last issue focused on management initiatives in the Food Stamp Program, we do not go into detail on them here, but suggest you see our October 1984 issue.

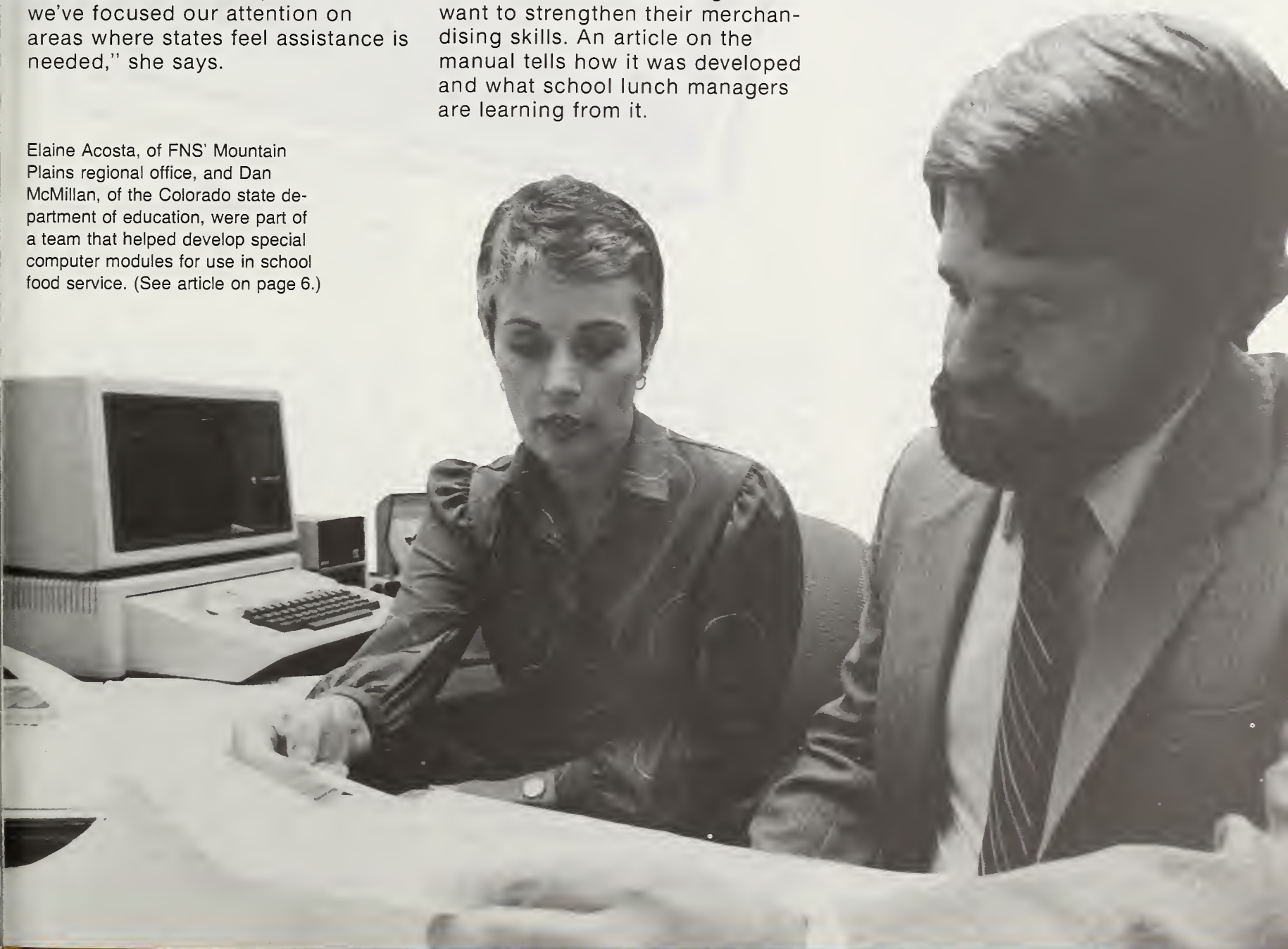
State and local agencies have technical assistance efforts of their own. In the Southeast, for example, eight states worked together and with FNS to develop a manual for school food service managers who want to strengthen their merchandising skills. An article on the manual tells how it was developed and what school lunch managers are learning from it.

Part of the technical assistance effort at FNS involves identifying and highlighting "best practices"—the work of state and local managers who are doing exceptionally good jobs or who have found creative solutions to problems. In this spirit, we have included two additional articles in this issue.

One article highlights the work of a woman named Sunny Red, who is the director of a meals program for the elderly in Arkansas that Assistant Secretary Mary Jarratt visited this past year. The other is about a very successful disaster feeding operation in the Southwest that is serving as a model for similar operations.

*article by Marilyn Stackhouse
photos by Larry Rana*

Elaine Acosta, of FNS' Mountain Plains regional office, and Dan McMillan, of the Colorado state department of education, were part of a team that helped develop special computer modules for use in school food service. (See article on page 6.)



Helping School Lunch Managers Use Computers

Everyone is into computers one way or another, it seems. So it's no surprise that the school lunch program is rapidly becoming computerized. Like their counterparts in other fields, school food service managers are increasingly looking to computers to help make their jobs easier and their programs more efficient.

While the benefits of using computers are clear to many people these days, knowing where to begin can be difficult—especially for those who have never worked with computer equipment or are unfamiliar with how it can be used.

This past year, in response to a growing number of requests for assistance from state and local school food service personnel, FNS added two new services to ease the transition to computers.

Special training course offered

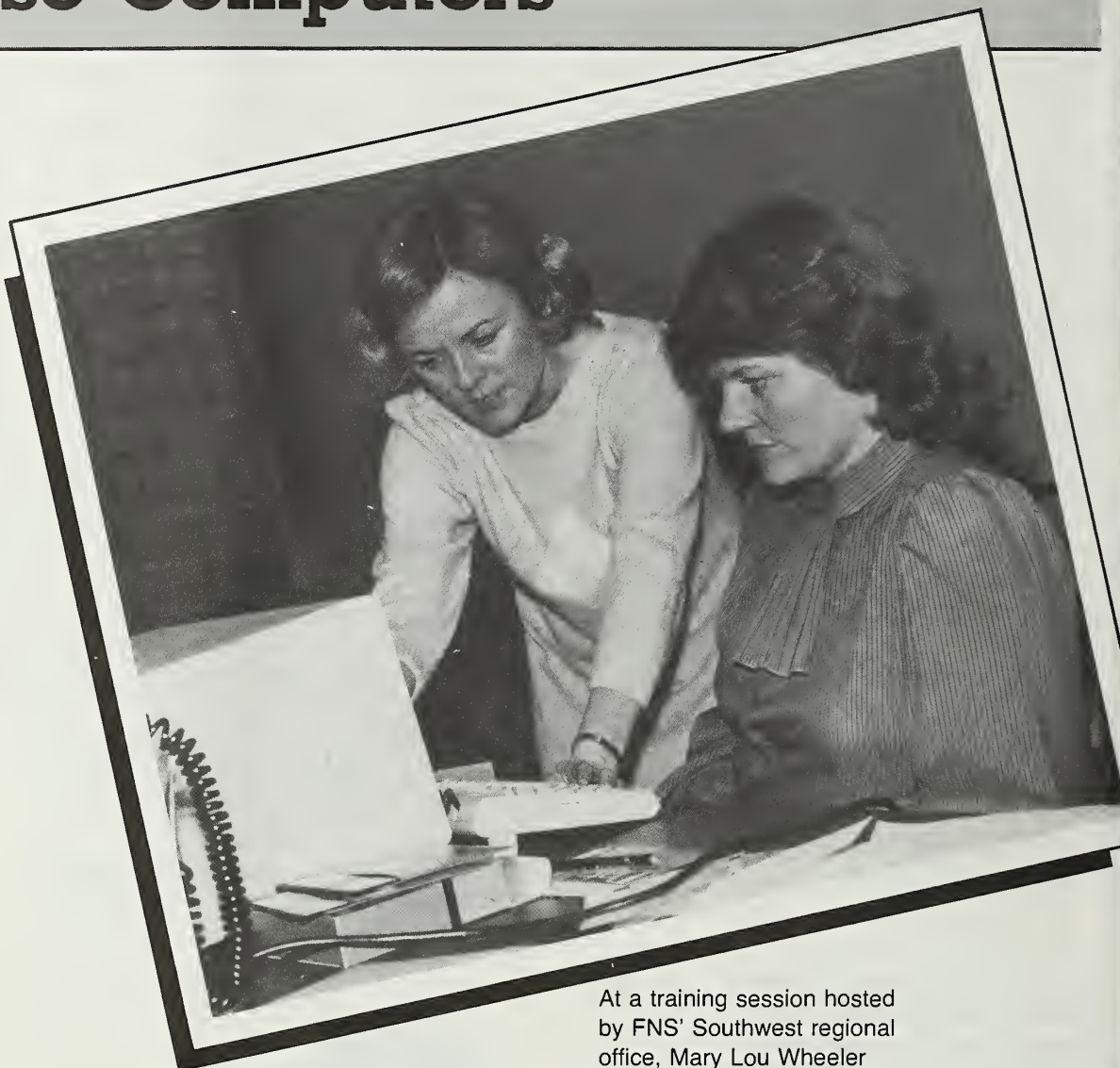
One is a new training program, started in July, that has a practical how-to emphasis. Under the program, state and local school food service personnel come to Washington, D.C. for a week's training on software developed by FNS specifically for use in school food service.

In some instances, FNS pays travel and other expenses, and, in return, trainees agree to provide training on the software back at their home base or in other states.

During the program's first 6 months, FNS trained 21 people, mainly from state agencies, as well as some people from local school districts. Five federal employees working at the regional level also received training and are in turn providing it to state food program managers. Knowledge of computers in the school food programs is growing as fast as words can travel.

The training course in Washington includes some general instruction on using microcomputers but focuses on using the three model programs developed for school food service by FNS regional and Washington staff.

The equipment being used in the



At a training session hosted by FNS' Southwest regional office, Mary Lou Wheeler shows Nelda Downer of Tulsa how to use the Televideo CP/M.

training program includes the Televideo 803 (CP/M), IBM and compatible systems (MS/DOS or PC/DOS), and Apple IIe and Apple IIc.

While learning to use the school food service modules, trainees learn to: follow a "menu," a list of options or selections from which they can access information; enter data; run reports; correct or display entries; make backup records; and store data.

Sample software also available

In addition to providing training on the software, FNS is also providing model software packages to school districts upon request. This means that schools that have computer equipment can save substantial time and reduce the cost of developing programs.

FNS has Apple system programs

for working on inventory control, keeping track of participation and revenue, figuring meal costs, and processing applications for free and reduced-price meals. These Apple system programs were developed by staff of FNS' Mountain Plains regional office (MPRO), who studied and revised a model system developed earlier in the Southeast for schools in Gaston County, North Carolina.

(For more details on the MPRO project, see the accompanying article on page 6. For details on the Gaston County model and a similar operation in Irving and Arlington, Texas, see our April 1982 issue.)

FNS also has Televideo and IBM (or compatible) modules that have these programs. These were developed by John Cantwell of FNS' automated data processing division



Also at the session in the Southwest, Louisiana's John Trojacek shows Annabella Fresquez of New Mexico how to use the Apple IIe.

in Washington.

Schools are invited to request and use all of these programs. Blank "diskettes" sent in will be copied and returned by FNS to school districts with user manuals for each module.

Bringing it all home...

Beth Okey has taken advantage of FNS software and is helping school districts use the FNS computer systems in Wisconsin. She is a local school food service consultant in the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Okey used FNS software last year with only moderate success. But this year FNS sent a new, revised disk and Okey has been working with programs for free and reduced-price applications and

inventory control. "Now I think we have it pretty well set," she says. "We understand how the software works and can help people around the state."

John Trojacek, chief of the financial section of the bureau of food and nutrition in the Louisiana Department of Education, was among the first trainees in Washington. As a result, he has provided training and technical assistance to school districts in his state, as well as to other states and regions in the country.

In August, he conducted a training session on the Apple computer system in Burlington, Massachusetts, where FNS' Northeast regional office (NERO) is located. Representatives from six states in the Northeast attended the session, as did personnel from the regional

office and people who had come from as far away as Chicago and Minnesota.

"By receiving training in the software programs, I've been able to make these programs readily available to the various school districts in the state," Trojacek says. "I try to work with the districts individually on their particular needs to see what approaches they want to take on the computer."

"Our ultimate goal is for each school district to be able to have access to our mainframe computer system and directly enter their claims for reimbursement into our computer system at the Department of Education."

Tools to make managing easier

The technical assistance that people like Trojacek and Okey receive is vital to school food service managers today. With computers they can instantly recall data that took hours and even days to compile before. They can use the computer to make life simpler—like printing out self-mailing letters to parents announcing free and reduced-price meal guidelines.

They can also use the computer to make the food service operation more economically competitive. With its help they can project participation trends, inventory highs and lows, food costs, supply costs, and energy costs. School food service people, managers of one of the country's largest food operations, are beginning to have the tools of "big business."

For more information on the computer training program or the software available from FNS, contact:

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*article by Ralph E. Vincent
photos by Yves Gerem*

Teamwork Makes Special Computer

Project a Success

When school food service managers in Gaston County, North Carolina, began computerizing their lunch program 5 years ago, they probably never dreamed they would be helping schools as far away as Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Aurora, Colorado. But that's exactly what's happened, thanks to some creative thinking and teamwork on the part of people in the Mountain Plains states.

For the past 2½ years, a team from the Food and Nutrition Service's Mountain Plains regional office (MPRO) has been working with state and local school district staffs to develop and refine a computer system, similar to the Gaston County model, that is suitable for small to mid-size school districts using micro computers.

The process has involved taking a close look at the software and users' manuals developed for Gaston, rewriting them with needed changes, and then making adjustments and readjustments during a series of tests in schools.

MPRO staffers Dan Schramm and Mark Betts from the automated data processing staff and Elaine Acosta and Chris Stewart of the nutrition and technical services staff formed the federal nucleus of the team that developed the system, and they're pleased with the results.

For districts of up to 60 schools

"What we were hoping to do," says Bernard Franta, acting regional administrator of FNS' Mountain Plains office, "was to come up with a system that would make it easier for schools to simplify inventory and reporting procedures.

"We felt there was a particular need to develop tools for smaller school districts because many of these districts had access to micro-computers but had not learned how to use them in their school lunch programs."

Conceived for districts with up to 60 schools, the system is designed

for use with the Apple II Plus, and can also be used with the Apple IIe and Apple IIc.

The system has four modules:

- An **inventory control module**, which generates reports on inventories for individual schools as well as for entire districts, and a monthly report on market orders, by item and by school.
- A **participation module**, which gives day-to-day participation (for both breakfast and lunch) broken down into free, reduced-price, and paid meals for children, with a separate category for meals served to adults. This module also gives a monthly summary, by school, of total participation and revenue, plus a daily total of deposits and cash receipts for each school.
- A **pre- and post-costing module**, which gives projected and actual costs by recipe and by menu. This gives district school food service directors a look at schools that may need help in that area.
- A **free and reduced-price application module**, which generates a

letter of notification to parents and stores information on required documentation.

Tests helped spot problems

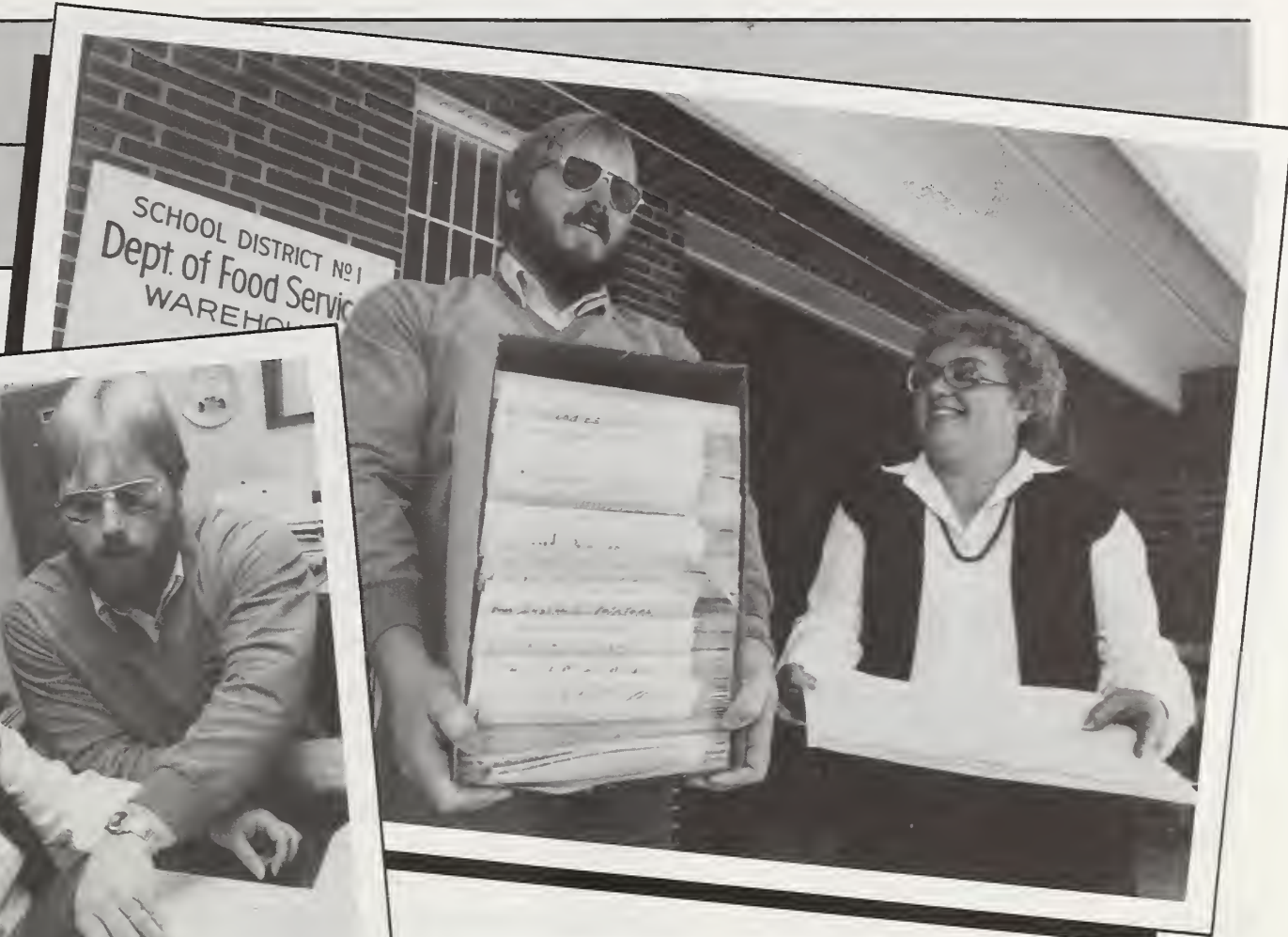
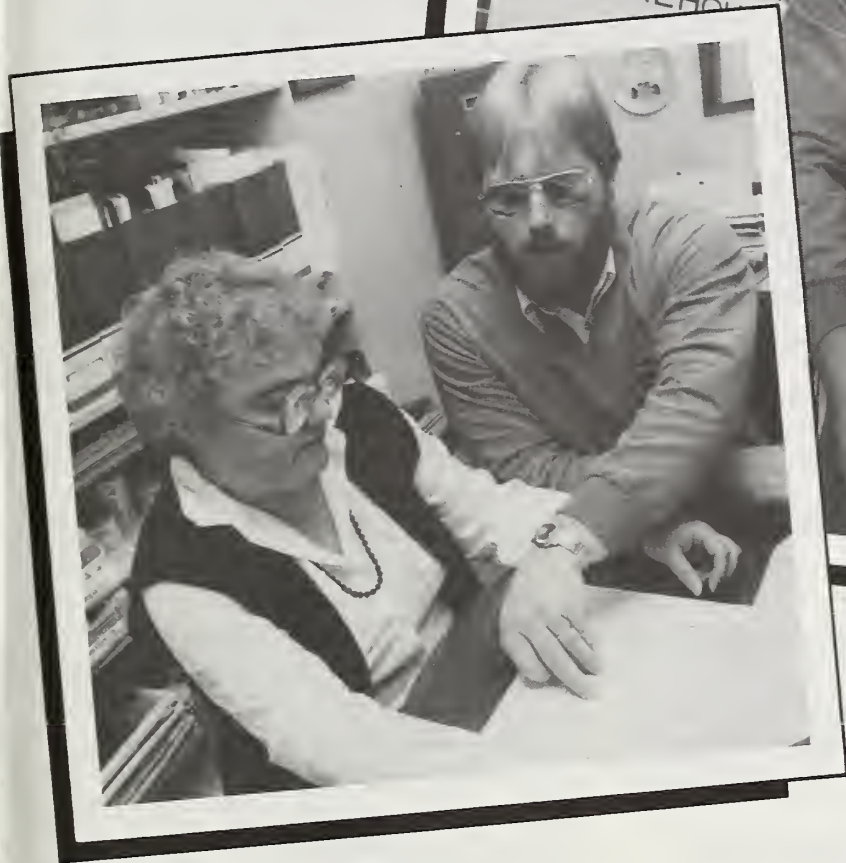
The system could not have been developed successfully without the cooperation of state and local school district staff, members of the FNS team stress. Initial testing, done in schools in Colorado, was extremely helpful in identifying problems that needed to be worked out before the system could actually be used.

"For example," says Dan Schramm, "we discovered that the inventory control module couldn't hold the amount of data needed on a disk. We went back and reworked it, keeping to the original style as much as possible, and maintaining its compatibility with the other modules. This was particularly important since the inventory module would eventually interface with the pre- and post-costing module."



The computer system developed by the Mountain Plains team is designed for districts with up to 60 schools. Here, Dan Schramm, who helped

develop and refine the system, looks over reports generated by one of the four modules. Many districts are now using the modules.



Joanne Paneitz and George Searce say the computer system has greatly simplified recordkeeping for Cheyenne schools. *Right:* Searce and Paneitz compare a year's inventory done manually and by computer.

Tests done in Aurora, Colorado, schools showed that there were some problems with the way the programs had been translated into "Applesoft Basic," the computer language being used. Some of the errors discovered were keypunch errors, the equivalent of typos in the print media.

Colorado Director of Child Nutrition Dan Wisotzkey had agreed to allow Dan McMillan of his staff to work with the FNS team to determine the system's suitability for Colorado schools. Originally, McMillan expected to work 2 weeks on the project.

As the team discovered the need for improvement, McMillan's work stretched into a steady month, plus several additional months of off-and-on work. In fact, it became a joke at the FNS regional office that McMillan would soon need FNS credentials.

With no computer background except for some college classes and practice on a home computer of his own, Dan McMillan found himself immersed in real on-the-job train-

ing. He's now familiar with how microcomputer operations *should* work.

"During the past 2 years," says McMillan, "it has been fascinating to learn from Dan Schramm and Mark Betts exactly how programming works. It was a good learning experience."

First used in Wyoming schools

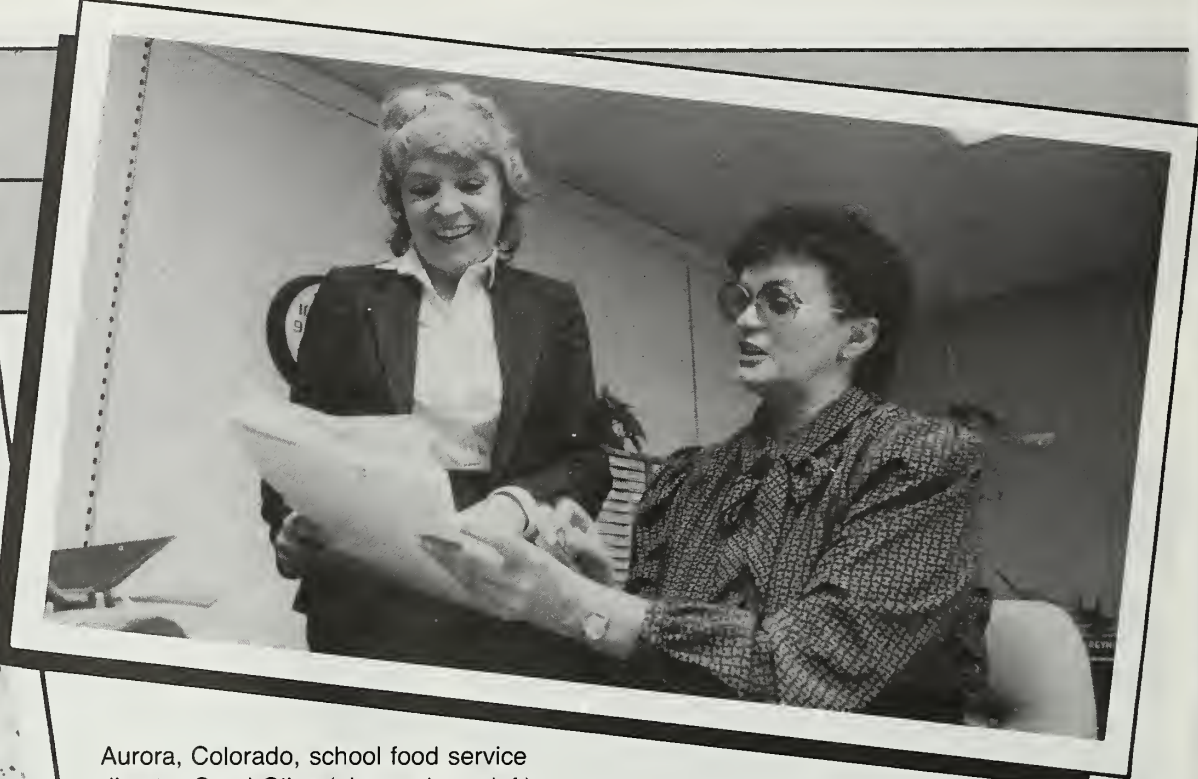
Schools in Wyoming were the first to actually implement the new computer system. Having heard about the program at a meeting of school business officials at which Elaine Acosta spoke, officials from the Laramie County School District in Cheyenne, Wyoming, decided they'd like to try it and asked their state agency to make a formal request to FNS.

Because Cheyenne is close enough to Denver that regional office staff could drive up there, Dan Schramm, Elaine Acosta, Chris Stewart, and Dan McMillan made an initial week-long visit in December 1982 to introduce all four modules.

Cheyenne decided to begin with the inventory control module and also do a little groundwork on the participation and revenue reporting module. By this time, the MPRO team thought most of the bugs had been eliminated. But during field testing in Cheyenne, as more data was put into the system, it became clear that more refinement was needed.

Working closely with Gene Searce, warehouse manager for Laramie County (who later received a certificate of appreciation from FNS for his help in implementing the system), and Michael Wiggam, who was at that time Wyoming's state coordinator of school food services, the team refined and re-wrote the system.

Cheyenne started using the inventory control module in January 1983, and the module was finally "debugged" and in place by September 1983. The district started putting the second module (participation and revenue reporting) into place in January 1984, and it's now completely functional.



Aurora, Colorado, school food service director Carol Oliva (above photo, left) and her staff use the inventory control module for ordering and keeping track of USDA commodities and nonfood items.

Managers see many advantages

The inventory control module is very popular with Scarce, who says it helps Laramie County keep its stock levels lower—for insurance and investment benefits—while maintaining adequate quantities as needed for day-to-day operations.

There are other pluses to the system as well. A big advantage is that managers now have access to more uniform and more readily available information—information they'd previously had to do without, in some cases.

It's also easier to place and keep track of orders and deliveries. Generating order tickets—which took 5 hours the “old way” (by hand)—now takes 15 minutes. Computer-generated market order summaries allow a quick check of what's ordered from vendors against what's come in.

Joanne Paneitz, food service director for Laramie County School District One, which encompasses the Cheyenne schools, says the inventory system saves her a lot of time. With the system, she now has a constant inventory as well as cumulative information on prices and the year's expenditures.

“We used to spend 2 days on our monthly inventory summary, compiling the inventory for our warehouse and the central kitchen,” she says. “It now takes us one afternoon.”

According to Paneitz, working with the system is a “breeze” now that the problems with it have been worked out. “It's making our job a lot easier,” she says. “It was worth all the hair-pulling.”

Now that the participation and revenue module is fully operational, recordkeeping is a lot easier. Computer print-outs serve as back-up on commodity inventories and participation data required by the state agency.

Usefulness depends on districts' needs

As a result of early acceptance in Cheyenne, the Wyoming state department of education sent copies of the software to school districts in Rock Springs, Gillette, and the Big Horn Basin Children's Center, all of whom expressed interest in using it in their areas.

Mike Smith, who is now coordinator of school food services for Wyoming's department of education, included a panel workshop on computer applications in the annual Wyoming School Food Service Conference in Laramie in August 1984. The workshop was moderated by Dan Schramm, and Gene Scarce was a panelist, speaking with authority about his growing expertise.

Theoretically, all Wyoming school districts could use at least some parts of the system; however, the smaller inventory and limited store-

room space in some small, one-kitchen districts limits the benefits to be derived.

Some Wyoming districts are tied into mainframe systems or have other equipment that is not compatible with the FNS system. Campbell County, for example, uses a mainframe IBM Systems 38, with a canned IBM program entitled “Applications Made Easy” to verify 100 percent of its free and reduced price applications, more than meeting FNS verification requirements.

Mike Smith and his staff are working with local districts to help them assess how useful the FNS system would be to them.

Other states express interest

The Mountain Plains regional office has now sent the software and manuals to each of its 10 states. North Dakota was interested only in the free and reduced price application module, but the other 9 states are looking at the entire program and most have sent it out to many of their districts.

Colorado has sent software to more than 60 of its districts. Aurora, Colorado, schools now use the inventory control module. According to Carol Oliva, Aurora's food service director, it's a pretty good system now, much better than when it was originally offered.

She uses it for ordering and

keeping track of inventory on non-food items and commodities; other items are delivered from vendors directly to schools. After the inventory module is fully operational, Oliva will be interested in tackling other modules.

Other Colorado towns and cities implementing one or more modules now include the tiny one-school town of Kim—with a population of 350—close to the New Mexico and Oklahoma borders; slightly larger Kersey; mid-sized Monte Vista and Craig; and Greeley, which boasts a population of over 53,000.

Greeley uses the participation and revenue reporting module now and plans to implement the inventory control and free and reduced-price application modules during this school year. Colorado Springs used part of the system for its summer program during 1984.

At the Mountain Plains regional office, work on the project continues. MPRO staff have completed training for all state agency people in their region who requested it, and they are now training FNS food program specialists who work with state staff.

They are also getting ready to send out to their states updated software with corrections in the participation and revenue reporting module and changes in the free and reduced price application module.

Model being used widely

The MPRO model is also being shared with states and schools outside the Mountain Plains region. The technology transfer section in FNS' Washington office is using the model in its training course for state and local school food service personnel (see accompanying article). Information on the system and accompanying materials is available on request.

Inquiries from states outside the Mountain Plains region should be directed to:

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*article by Joanne Widner
photos by Larry Rana*





Buying Food

Not many people think of school food service as big business, and in many ways, it's not. But food bought for school meals ranks fourth in sales and volume in the American food service industry.

The value of food handled in 1 year by U.S. elementary and high schools is over \$5.5 billion. Food accounts for over 55 percent of the cost of each meal served through the National School Lunch Program. Balancing the need for acceptable products at reasonable prices is a continuing challenge for school food service managers.

To help them meet this challenge, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service sponsored a series of six workshops at locations throughout the country during the past year. The workshops helped define food purchasing problems and provided tips and techniques to help managers of school lunch and other institutional programs lower their food costs and improve the quality of their meals.

"For the first time," says Jerry Stein, national workshop coordinator, "we had experts from the private sector working with people from federal, state, and local governments on all aspects of food procurement."

Changes can make a difference...

According to Stein, even small changes in buying practices can save schools a lot of money. "We've found that school districts pay an exceedingly wide range of prices for the same food," he explains.

"One school district, for example, might be paying as little as \$18 for Grade B cling peaches, while another district, 50 miles away, is paying \$33 for similar peaches. The difference is that the manager in the first district knows how to get the product at a better price than the manager in the second."

The purpose of the workshops was to help school lunch managers become more aware of differences in buying techniques that can enable them to get more for their money. Stein estimates that schools could save at least 10 percent on food costs by using some of the techniques outlined at the food

procurement workshops.

More than 2,500 people took part in the food procurement conferences, which were held between April 1983 and March 1984 in Downingtown, Pennsylvania; Keystone, Colorado; Chicago, Illinois; San Francisco, California; Dallas, Texas; and Swanne, Georgia.

Participants included food service directors from both large and small districts as well as representatives from state and federal agencies working with child nutrition programs. Representatives from the Department of Defense and the Bureau of Prisons, which have responsibility for large institutional programs, also took part.

Workshops covered variety of topics

Each of the conferences lasted 3½ days and included speeches, panel discussions, and workshops. Participants learned about procurement principles, standards of identity and labeling, contract buying, the impact of recent anti-trust law developments on procurement practices, and services available from various private and government agencies, such as USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

In a series of talks that in some regions were called "All You Need to Know About..." panelists and participants discussed how to buy, store, use, and serve the major food

products: meat and meat products; seafood and fish; dairy, poultry, and egg products; fresh fruits and vegetables; and baked goods.

At several of the conferences, there were presentations on how the private sector buys food, how the Department of Defense handles its purchases, and how producer groups can help. At some conferences, representatives from the American School Food Service Association led discussions about regional successes in food purchasing, and school food service directors talked about merchandising.

"We had scheduled in plenty of



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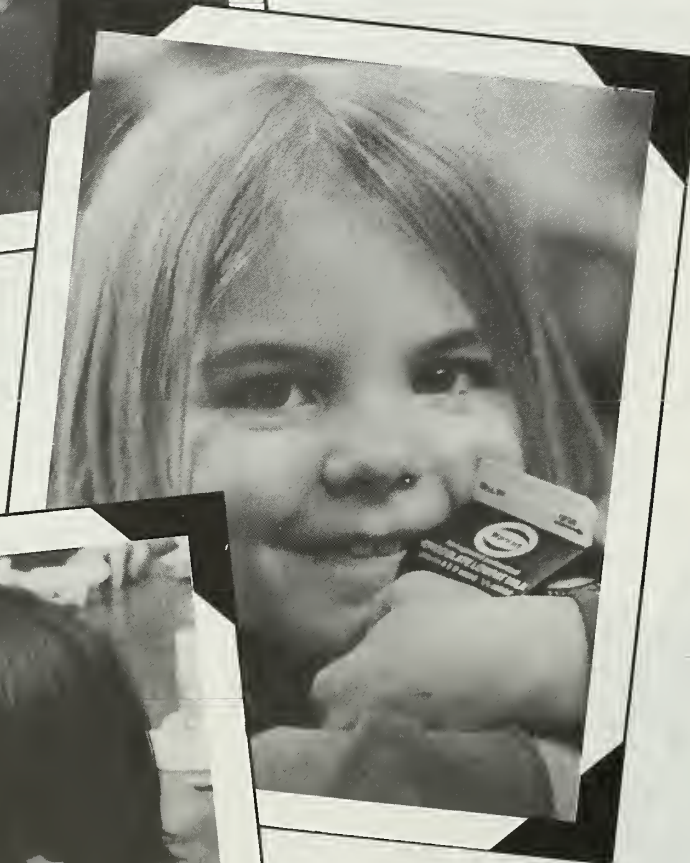
"We had scheduled in plenty of

Louis Dell, president of Frosty Acres, Inc., a major cooperative

"There are two problems with this," says Jerry Stein. "First, what these specifications call for is 90-percent lean beef. While we encourage

Dell stresses the importance of using the right product for the right purpose. For example, reconstituted tomato paste is less expensive per ounce than tomato juice, tomato sauce or tomato puree. If you are making chili, you can substitute tomato paste cut with water. Similarly, if you are making sloppy joes, you can use standard, crushed tomatoes in water rather than extra





standard whole tomatoes. "It's a waste to use a more expensive product," he says.

Dell says there are a number of places you can economize and still have the same food value and good flavor. Irregularly cut fruits and vegetables will often serve as well as top grade, and it's not necessary to use all whole-grain long rice. Broken pieces in rice don't detract from the quality of the product.

Dell also points out that there is no need to use frozen, fancy-cut corn or fancy green peas in a steamtable operation. He suggests using a product graded "A" for color and bloom, "A" for extraneous material, and "C" for maturity. A mature, frozen cut corn that is passed its peak will hold up better on the steamtable than a more tender variety.

"Using mature products on your school lunch steamtable is another way of stretching your food dollars," he says.

Getting quality in the marketplace

In addition to knowing what to buy, it's also important to know how and when to buy, say the experts.

"There's a wide variety of products from many different places," says Bill Virts, vice-president of procurement for the Marriott Corporation, "and their availability varies from season to season. It requires almost constant monitoring of the marketplace."

Virts, who attended several of the conferences and talked about how the private sector buys food, says that commercially many buying groups, including Marriott, have professional buyers on their staff. The buyers have specialized expertise in a particular product area such as canned goods, produce, or meat and know the market values, availability, and quality differences for their products.

Fritz Covillo, president of International Food Service Consultants and former senior vice-president and general manager of Shamrock Foods, says that Shamrock also has buyers who specialize in product areas. The buyers have the exper-

tise to know, for example, that the yield in certain lower priced items can drop at the rate of 30 percent per serving. This means the package you pay a dollar more for could give you 10 percent more yield.

Virts and Covillo agree that school food service directors don't have the time to monitor the wide range of products for grade, quality, and the best buys like the professional buyers. But they can rely on distributors who have the specialized food purchasing expertise to do this for them on a much more sophisticated level than they could do on their own.

According to Stein, in school food programs that work best, local school food service managers have found good suppliers and developed partnerships with them that are mutually beneficial.

He explains, "The supplier gets good buys on quality products and that helps the school food service manager serve good, low-priced meals. This keeps the kids coming back, and the more lunches the school sells, the more business the supplier gets. If there is an adversarial relationship with the supplier, everyone loses, including the kids."

Buying in volume has advantages

Many panelists urged participants to look for ways to increase their purchasing power by buying in volume.

One way to do this is to buy cooperatively. School districts in close proximity, for example, can get together and consolidate their purchases of milk or other products. This helps small schools achieve the buying power of larger ones and assures them of competition among suppliers. Centralized purchasing allows a cooperative group to make the most of volume discounts, while eliminating several layers of middlemen, which also means savings.

Another way to increase volume is through contract buying, a method used by many fast food chains, food management companies, and other institutional buyers. Contract buying is what its name implies: the buyer enters into a

contract with a particular supplier who agrees to provide certain products or lines of products for a particular period of time.

Sometimes the price is set—X dollars for X amount of goods for X amount of weeks or months. Sometimes the contract is on a "cost plus" basis. Cost plus is the cost of the product to the wholesaler plus a set fixed fee for service.

Using contract buying, a school district might arrange to purchase an entire assortment of goods—paper products, perishable items, and bulk products, for example—all from the same supplier. The district is, in effect, consolidating much of its purchases and deliveries at one source.

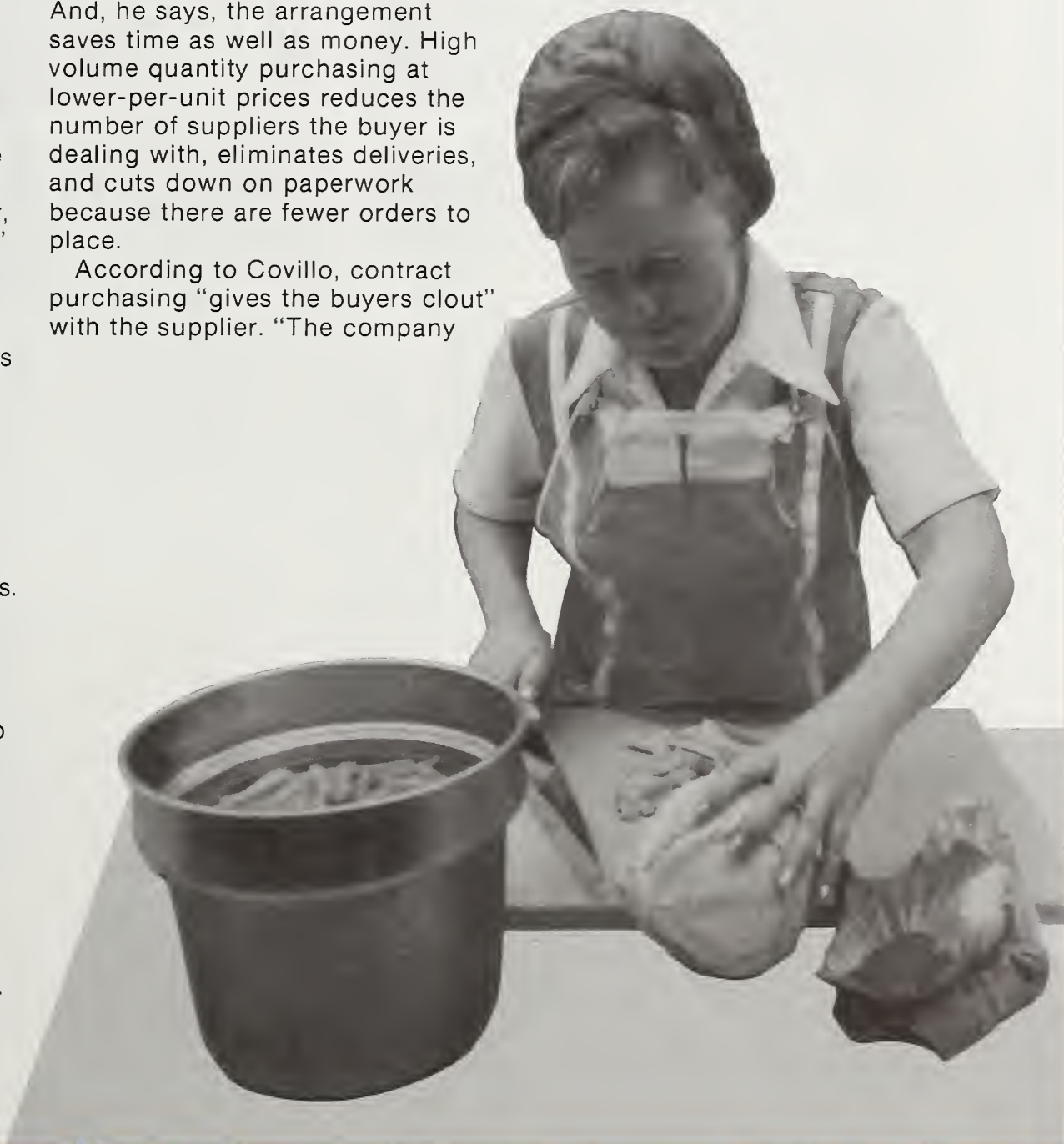
By doing this, instead of purchasing each item separately, the buyer increases interest and competition among suppliers, says Fritz Covillo. And, he says, the arrangement saves time as well as money. High volume quantity purchasing at lower-per-unit prices reduces the number of suppliers the buyer is dealing with, eliminates deliveries, and cuts down on paperwork because there are fewer orders to place.

According to Covillo, contract purchasing "gives the buyers clout" with the supplier. "The company

realizes they have a good customer, and they are going to make sure that the deliveries are timely and the customer is never short. They can't afford to lose this customer since a large portion of their business may be at stake."

Private industry panelists agreed that contract buying is a good way to save. "Contract buying alone can save significant amounts of money and should be considered by food service directors," says Louis Dell. "It also makes buying and selling food much simpler because both buyer and seller are working together.

"If you can deal with the same person over a long period of time and develop an understanding between the supplier and the customer, the customer is going to be more satisfied overall."



Tips from the "Greengrocer"

Contract buying works in Seattle

Ken Baer, school food service director in Seattle, has been purchasing on a contract basis using cost plus since 1979. Baer was a member of a panel on successes in food purchasing at the San Francisco conference and talked about why the arrangement works for him.

Baer develops a competitive proposal that is sent out to all the suppliers in his area for bid. The successful bidder is then selected based on his end costs, including acquisition costs and service fees.

Several contracts are combined for deliveries of merchandise at controlled prices over an extended period of time. Baer pre-screens some of the vendors to ensure that they have the ability to perform, and the bid award is given to the supplier who provides the best results.

Prior to using cost plus, Baer would purchase different categories of foods at different times. This, he says, made it difficult to cope with cost changes. Baer explains that under state bidding laws, it would take up to 3 months to get a bid and there was no guarantee that the price would remain the same.

"It was difficult for us to plan and regulate the utilization of our resources—trucks, equipment, warehouse space—let alone our procurement activities," Baer says. "Cost plus gives us more flexibility."

Baer finds that using the cost plus method also saves money on deliveries. Each vendor delivery costs a minimum of \$25 no matter what the size, so the more deliveries, the higher the total costs. Because Baer used to have separate bids for meats, frozen foods, canned goods, and staple items, each would be delivered by different vendors.

Under cost plus, he has combined his contracts and has one company deliver his fresh produce, meats, frozen foods, canned goods, and quite a few staple items. "We have one truck going to one school to deliver all those items," Baer says.

According to Baer, some school food service directors express concern about contract buying because

of the need to audit such a system. They worry that with the cost plus system, buyers might not have an incentive to keep prices down since the higher the price the wholesaler pays, the more money they make.

Baer says he has not found this to be the case. But he advises people using this system to regularly audit the price the wholesaler pays to make sure that they have a good, reliable dealer. It's in the dealers' best interest to give their customers a good price, Baer says. "A supplier will lose your business if he becomes noncompetitive."

Baer points out that cost plus may not be for everyone. However, the system works in Seattle and Baer sees tremendous opportunities to make savings, improve service, and be assured of better quality products.

Workshops stimulate other activities

Helping school food service directors get better service and better quality products for their money was what the food procurement conferences were all about. Toni Di Muzio, food service director in Prince Georges County, Maryland, attended the Downingtown conference and feels he and other participants learned a lot from the sessions.

"The conference stimulated thoughts and ideas on operating an efficient program," Di Muzio says. "And it's good to know resource people who can help us with the tricks of the trade, especially on purchasing and specifications." He feels information on how to write specifications for products used widely in schools, such as ground beef, is particularly helpful.

Thelma Becker, food service director of the Souderton, Pennsylvania, school district, agrees that the information on specifications was helpful to many participants.

"Although I have an understanding of specifications," she says, "there are many less experienced in the field. They can benefit from learning a rule of measure for what should be expected in a product and how to write specifications to get it." Becker was a participant at

Joe Carcione, known to millions of Americans as the "Greengrocer," spoke at the San Francisco food procurement workshop on how to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. The topic is a natural for Carcione, whose family has been in the produce business in the San Francisco area for three generations.

Carcione has been giving advice in his daily newspaper column and on radio and television since 1967. His television tips for selecting and preparing fresh fruits and vegetables appear daily on 65 stations nationwide. He has also published a fruit and vegetable buying guide and a cookbook.

Carcione has a special interest in what children are eating in school. He acknowledges that school food service directors are faced with difficult choices in purchasing produce, partly because supplies are constantly changing and quality and condition vary greatly.

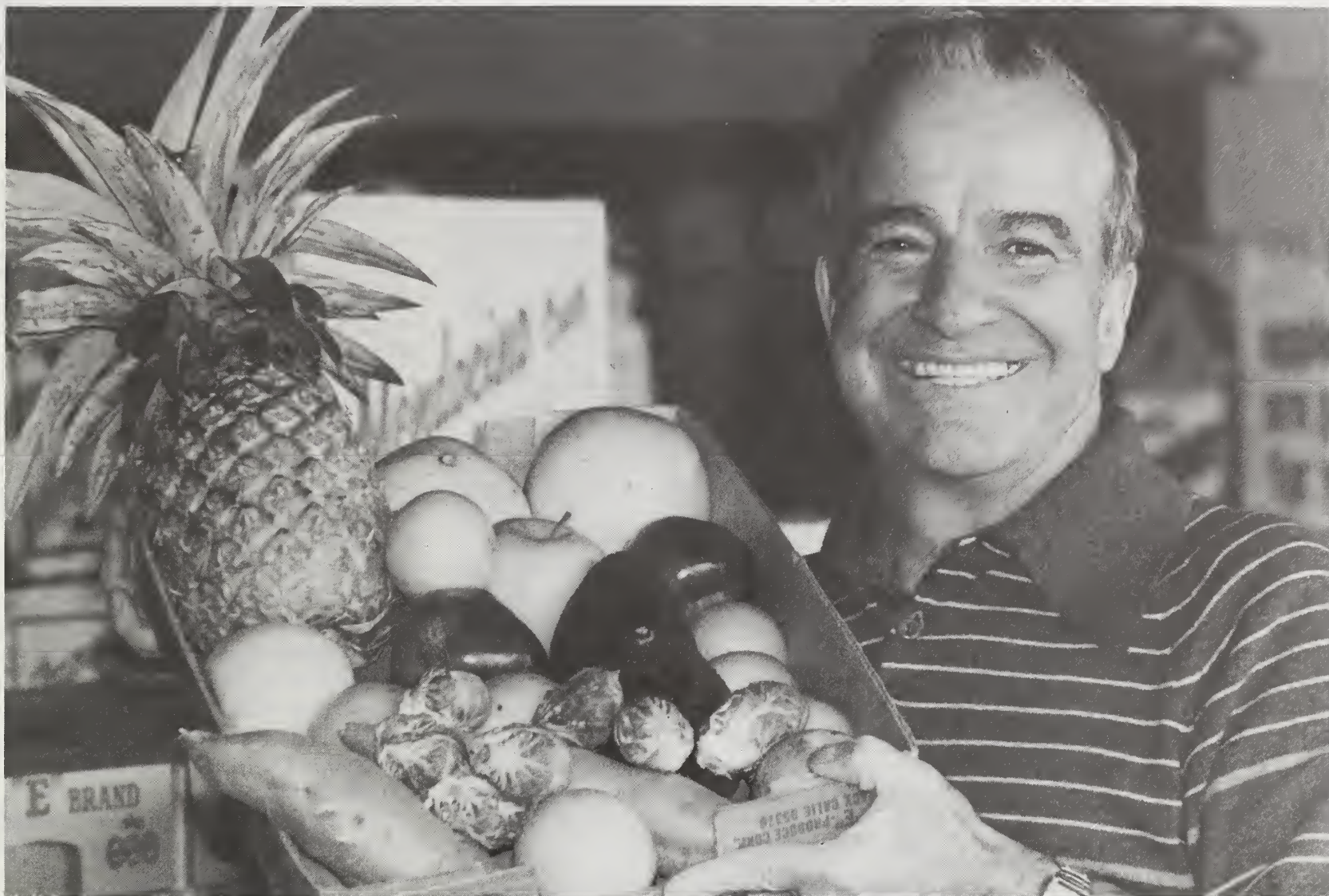
But a little more knowledge about what to look for in terms of quality, nutrition, and economy can make buying produce easier, he says, because it gives buyers more to rely on than simply habit or chance.

Some rules to follow

Carcione suggests a few general rules to follow when purchasing fruits and vegetables. He recommends using "your eyes and nose to judge freshness and quality." Fresh fruits and vegetables talk to you with their colors and aromas, he says. For example, when a banana has dark spots on its skin, it is completely ripe and has more sugar than starch. It is fragrant, bursting with flavor and will be easier to digest.

Carcione insists that children should be served fruit that is ripe and in good condition. He explains that this can be difficult since often produce is picked and sent to market when it is green.

Stone fruits such as peaches, apricots, plums, cherries, and nectarines will not increase in sugar content from the minute they are picked from the tree. They will only change color. Pome fruits such as apples and pears do increase their



sugar content.

Peaches used to have a certain amount of red blush before they were shipped to markets. The buyer could judge a good peach based on its red blush and amber skin. But, Carcione explains, varieties of peaches have been developed that have the required red blush but are green and immature. Carcione cautions, "If you bite into a grape that isn't sweet or an apple that is sour and hard to bite into, you don't want it."

Ripeness affects nutritional value

Carcione notes that ripeness affects nutritional value as well as taste. For example, a green bell pepper is a good source of vitamins A and C. But, says Carcione, when the green bell pepper turns red ripe there is a 40-percent increase in vitamin A and a 10-percent increase in vitamin C.

In shopping for produce, Carcione says, be sure to check color, texture, and freshness. For example, if a head of iceberg lettuce has some spring to it, is round and well

formed and has fresh-looking outer leaves, you have a head of lettuce that is sure to be good to eat. If it is white or hard, it will probably be over mature and have a large bitter core.

Professionals check the cut end because as lettuce gets older, the cut end turns brown. The lettuce should also smell sweet, not bitter, and have a creamy color. So what Carcione calls the "nose test" can mean the difference between bitter and sweet-tasting lettuce.

Buy in season and locally

Carcione recommends buying produce in season whenever possible for flavor and economy. But avoid produce advertised as "first of the crop," he cautions. The price will be high and it may have been harvested a week or so prior to full maturity.

Carcione also suggests buying locally produced fruits and vegetables whenever possible because nothing can equal the flavor of vine or tree-ripened produce. Some produce will be available locally only

during certain seasons, however. Carrots, for example, are available in certain areas primarily in the spring.

Some produce can be enjoyed all year round. For example, we can have crisp, flavorful apples year round because of controlled atmosphere storage which, without additives, keeps fruit fresh until it is marketed.

"There is no excuse for the condition of some fruits and vegetables on the market," Carcione says. "If school food service directors don't think the produce they are getting has the standards of quality they have every right to expect, they should look for produce that does, or find a knowledgeable produce buyer."

School food service directors will have another chance to hear more from Carcione at the American School Food Service Association in Philadelphia in June.

*article by Susan Acker
photo courtesy of Joe Carcione*

the Downingtown conference and served on a panel on merchandising school lunches.

Information on who to contact for assistance and resource information after the conference has already been useful, says Di Muzio. "This was one of the highlights for me," he says. "I ran into problems with a vendor and contacted several divisions at USDA for assistance."

He explains that the poultry division at the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) sent him technical brochures that helped him develop specifications. "When we had problems with writing specifications for ground beef, I also called on the graders at USDA to get the benefit of their expertise," Di Muzio adds.

Joseph Shepherd, national director of FNS' Food Distribution Pro-

gram, is pleased with what the workshops accomplished. "Having the kinds of exchanges that occurred is beneficial to everyone concerned," he says. "The workshops showed us that there are strong possibilities for making changes, and they also helped the private sector better appreciate our problems. This is important if we are going to work together to reduce costs."

Conference planners hoped the workshops would stimulate similar efforts at the state level. This is happening in many areas. So far, at least 31 states have either scheduled or conducted conferences of their own, and FNS expects more to join the list.

Food purchasing manual produced

Another result of the conferences was the development of a comprehensive food purchasing manual for schools. "During the course of the conferences," says Shepherd, "it became apparent that we needed something that people could take with them to use after the conferences were over."

In developing the manual, FNS used as a prototype a series of food purchasing manuals developed by Mississippi. Among other things, the new manual includes information on buying techniques, specifications, ways to properly store and handle food, and descriptions of commercial products. Thirty sets of the manual were sent to each FNS region. FNS has asked states to reproduce them for interested school districts.

The agency is now in the process of expanding certain elements of the manual. "For example," says Shepherd, "we are including a directory that school food service directors can use to get in touch with the right people for assistance in a wide range of areas. It can serve as a reference for answers to questions on such things as food safety and sanitation, predatory trade practices, and information on weights and measures.

"We are also developing fact sheets on items such as ground beef with specific information on size, packaging, and specifications," Shepherd adds. "And, we are expanding our product listing catalog from 600 to more than 1,500 items.

"We are also asking school food service directors to send us samples of the kinds of items they purchase, so that our manual will be as comprehensive as possible. We would like to have lists that reflect regional and ethnic preferences."

Anyone interested in obtaining copies of the purchasing manual for school food supervisors can contact their state food distribution director.



A Food Buying Checklist

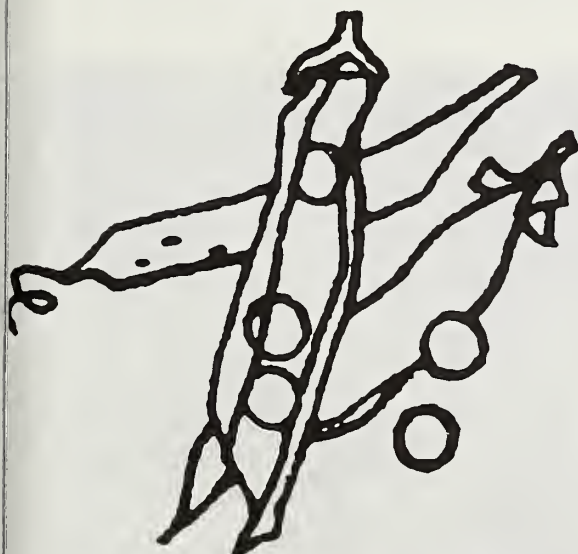
For more information on the food procurement workshops, contact:

Jerry Stein
Food Distribution Division
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

For more information on services available from USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, write:

Information Division
Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

article by Susan Acker



✓ Plan your menus well in advance in order to avoid purchasing too little or too much, too frequently or not often enough.

✓ Make sure every service request is cost effective—don't ask for costly services from the vendor that you could handle yourself. For example, it is usually cheaper and more cost effective for a school food service staff to store food supplies in the kitchen storage area instead of having the vendor store them.

✓ Be very explicit in writing specifications and purchase contracts. Make sure you include the grade, class, style, weight, and packaging size of products.

✓ Make sure you don't require something in your bid specifications that you can't monitor.

✓ Build assurances into negotiations with processors, suppliers, and transporters that products will arrive in acceptable condition with regard to temperature, spoilage, dented cans, and maturity level.

✓ Fit the quality to the need. Irregularly cut fruits and vegetables will often serve as well as top grade.

✓ Be sure the product fits its use in the menu. Don't purchase Grade A, Number 1 sieve peas for making beef stew. Large Grade C peas would be far better for this purpose.

✓ Compare price quotes with appropriate government or private pricing sources to determine fair market value.

✓ Make sure you identify and take advantage of all discount allowances. Many national brand companies provide special price allowances to school food service programs.

✓ Make sure you actually get the quality you pay for. Always check delivered items against your purchase order and the vendor's invoice.

✓ Pay your bills promptly to maximize "fast pay" discounts.

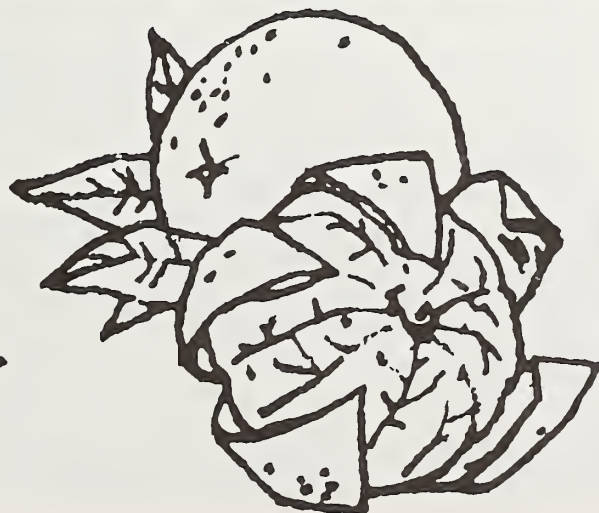
✓ Monitor payments for discounts for promotion for fast payment allowances.

✓ Cut transportation and distribution costs through cooperative buying and contract buying. This minimizes the per-unit cost of each delivery.

✓ Take maximum advantage of competition among vendors. Shop around as much as possible. Avoid sole-source suppliers.

✓ You must have confidence in your supplier, so buy from a reputable company.

✓ Make sure all agreements and purchasing contracts are mutually beneficial to the seller as well as the buyer. One-sided agreements are disastrous to everyone.



"Merchandising" School Lunches

Students in the Southeast are finding lunch more attractive these days, thanks to a new school food service merchandising manual called the *School Recipe Portfolio*.

Developed by eight Southeastern states working together and with the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the manual is the first full-color recipe book ever produced for use in school food service. It is also the first standard reference for food preparation and appearance.

In addition to recipes, the manual includes sections on food displays, self-service systems, and serving lines. The *Portfolio* is designed to help cafeteria managers "merchandise" their food—as the competition does—by presenting it attractively as well as making it good to eat, and nourishing.

Research showed need for manual

The manual culminates 2 years of joint effort by school food service officials in Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. FNS' Southeast regional office initiated the project in the summer of 1982 when state food service training specialists met in Raleigh, North Carolina, to discuss the training needs of local school food service employees.

Marlene Gunn, who supervises school food programs for the Mississippi Department of Education, is the state coordinator for the project and has been involved since its inception. "This project started," she says, "because USDA brought us together and encouraged us to look at the training needs for the school lunch program."

Before deciding to do the manual, a committee of federal and state staff spent 8 months researching training needs. Each state performed a literature search on a particular training area to see what technical assistance was available.

"State training coordinators had identified merchandising of food as the number one technical assistance need before the literature search," says Gunn, "and the survey confirmed that training on merchandising was needed the most."

The research committee recommended that a standardized merchandising manual should be produced to meet the need for more uniform food preparation standards. They suggested it be simple, easy-to-read, and durable, and most important, that it depict cafeteria meals as they are to appear on serving lines.

"We wanted to present a visual standard by which the quality of food could be measured, so cooks would have a goal to reach," Gunn explains.

State child nutrition program directors agreed on the need for such a project and gave approval for the use of some of the administrative funds they receive from FNS. Representatives of state and local boards of education from each of the eight states then met in Jackson, Mississippi, to determine a format for the manual and formulate guidelines for its production.

Content, format chosen carefully

The Mississippi Department of Education volunteered to administer the project, and a search began for an advertising agency and a food consultant. The states selected Godwin Advertising Agency, Inc., of Jackson, Mississippi, to produce the manual and Sandra Klipstein, R.D., of the SunHealth Corporation, Charlotte, North Carolina, as consultant for recipe testing. All recipe testing was done in the North Carolina Department of Public Education test kitchen.

Most of the portfolio's recipes and recommendations came from practicing school food service employees. They were drawn from the USDA recipe card files and from the personal files of various local district supervisors. The recipes were chosen carefully to reinforce good nutrition practices as part of the merchandising concept.

"In selecting the recipes," says Gunn, "we examined where our nutritional problems were. Since consumption of fruits and vegetables was down, we put more emphasis on these foods while reducing the number of desserts."

We wanted to show appealing ways to serve fruit as a substitute for desserts."

Training on the manual has emphasized that recipe instructions should be followed and that extra sugar, salt, and fat should not be added. Even in photographs in the manual, no extra fat or grease is shown since food is cooked exactly as the recipe states.

Marlene Gunn stresses that the manual does not replace other technical publications. "Food service directors should use the portfolio with other technical aids, such as the USDA recipe cards," she says. "The manual was not intended as a single source for technical guidance."

This idea is being reinforced in training being given to school food service supervisors. States are providing training on the manual to school food service personnel in public schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, and FNS regional staff are training personnel in private schools and residential child care institutions. The training includes demonstra-



At a training session sponsored by FNS' Southeast regional office in Atlanta, FNS staff share ideas on using the manual with state and local food service managers. *Far right:* FNS staffers Lanna Busman and Liz Pendleton prepare garnishes using the manual. *Center:* Lyn Kirkland, also of FNS, reviews the manual with food service director Linda Dopson.

tions of merchandising techniques.

Each state has made a commitment that the manual would not be given to anyone without some training. "Everyone who received a manual either has received or will receive training in its use this year," says Gunn.

Positive results in South Carolina

Vivian Pilant, director of the office of school food services in the South Carolina Department of Education, has been very active in the planning and testing of the *School Recipe Portfolio*.

Last summer, more than 700 school food managers in South Carolina were trained to use the manual through the state's Project SIFT—Skills Improvement in Food Service Techniques. During 3 days of training, the managers were introduced to the manual, given practical help in using it, and asked to demonstrate what they learned by preparing and displaying meals.

"The training results have been very positive and we have seen better menu planning," says Pilant.

"The portfolio was received enthusiastically by all managers, and we succeeded in getting them to turn their employees on to it. Cafeteria staffs are trying the recipes and are even meeting to discuss the next day's menu items."

Videotapes and slides are available to help states with training. South Carolina has also used monthly newsletters and statewide educational television. One television show, for example, demonstrated the easy-to-make garnishes found in the portfolio.

Tomato roses, made from tomato skins, and onion chrysanthemums, which look like the flower, were shown as examples of garnishes made from products usually found in the kitchen. "The next day," Pilant laughs, "the whole state was blooming with onion chrysanthemums and tomato roses."

Feedback on technical assistance has also been part of the training in South Carolina. This year, local school systems have been asked to submit evidence of improvements, such as changes in the food line setup or in weekly menu planning,

made as a result of the portfolio. In return, state staff give personalized embossed name badges to recognize outstanding efforts.

Manual is being distributed widely

The *School Recipe Portfolio* represents the combined efforts of the Food and Nutrition Service, the departments of education in participating states, cafeteria managers, food consultants, stylists, photographers, and advertising professionals. Development of the *Portfolio* is an example of the creativity and innovation that can occur when state and federal agencies work cooperatively with each other and with private industry.

"The logistics of this effort were a challenge for all of us," says Marlene Gunn. "The recipes were tested in North Carolina, the coordinating agency was in Mississippi, the photography was done in Atlanta, and the printing was done in Memphis."

"We received very strong support from the Food and Nutrition Service," she adds. "They even helped



Meals for the Elderly in

us find the exact USDA commodities that were needed to test the recipes. That was important because commercially purchased nonfat dry milk does not work as well in the recipes as the USDA dry milk."

Vivian Pilant notes that state government staffs had to work together closely to negotiate contracts among states to publish the manual. "The attorney generals got to know each other on a first-name basis," she says.

The manual is being distributed free to more than 15,000 schools in the eight states that contributed funds to its development. It is also being reprinted to meet requests from schools and state agencies in other areas, who may purchase it through the Godwin Group, the Mississippi advertising agency that worked with participating states on the project.

Godwin's contract provides for reprinting the merchandising manual through 1989. The price is approximately \$50 a copy, although it may be higher or lower at time of purchase depending on printing costs and other factors.

For more information on purchasing the manual, or to place orders, contact:

Godwin Group
School Recipe Portfolio
P.O. Box 531
Jackson, Mississippi 39205
Telephone: (601) 354-5711

For more information on the development of the manual or training on it, contact:

Marlene Gunn
State Department of Education
P.O. Box 771
Jackson, Mississippi 39205
Telephone: (601) 352-8480

Vivian Pilant
Office of School Food Services
South Carolina Department of Education
1429 Senate Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
Telephone: (803) 758-7665

*article and photos
by Kent Taylor*

When Assistant Secretary Mary Jarratt visited the Saline County Adult Center, she was particularly impressed by the elderly feeding program in this town of 18,000, some 25 miles southwest of Little Rock, Arkansas.

The center serves more than 4,500 hot meals each month to Saline County residents who are 60 years or older and their spouses. More than 1,000 of these are meals delivered directly to the homes by county volunteers. These meals often include USDA commodities such as butter, cheese, and powdered milk.

What makes this program such a success, and how can similar programs in other parts of the country match the services provided in Saline County?

"Community relations, community relations, and community relations," says senior center manager Sunny Red. "Unless you have support in the community like we do, you'll have a hard time getting volunteers, facilities, and other resources needed to carry out a project of this size. You need the whole community behind you to succeed."

While she believes the success of her program has a lot to do with the size of Benton, she feels a similar project in a large metropolitan area may succeed as well, perhaps because of availability of mass

transportation, which is always a problem in a small town.

Program reaches many people

Red, a Little Rock native and a licensed practical nurse, has been in charge of the program for 8½ years. She oversees an annual budget of about \$200,000 and a paid staff of 3 full-time and 10 part-time employees. She says that up to 50 volunteers help out in the elderly feeding program every day.

"We have more than 600 elderly enrolled in our programs and are reaching one in every seven persons in the county," says Red, emphasizing again that "we have excellent rapport with everybody and that's what enables us to get support from the community."

Of the 55,000 residents of Saline County, almost a third are over 60 years of age. An Alcoa plant with close to 1,000 employees is the area's largest employer and helps make Saline one of the most prosperous among Arkansas counties.

County residents contribute to and take part in a variety of activities connected with the center. In addition to serving or receiving congregate or home-delivered meals, they provide free transportation to the senior center and other points in the county.



The Saline County Adult Center serves more than 4,500 hot meals each month. More than 1,000 of these meals are delivered to participants' homes by volunteers. Here, center aid

and driver Carl Norris loads a van with the day's lunches, which are packed in special transport boxes.

Saline County



Above: Manager Sunny Red talks with two women who often come to the center for meals and companionship.
Below: Head cook Ella Mae Medcalf (center), baker Al Brigman, and another staff member prepare lunch. Meal preparation begins early.



Coordination is the Key

They participate in regular nutrition education and consumer information workshops. Volunteers provide many services to shut-ins and those too sick to leave their homes. Elderly people have access to various medical services through the senior center.

The Saline County's Council on Aging was organized in 1974, says Red. Funds for the construction of the senior center were made available through a bond issue supported by a property tax increase, and additional funds were provided by virtually every local business and by numerous individuals. The center opened in 1974.

Meal service has expanded

During the first two quarters of fiscal year 1984, about 19,000 meals were served at the senior center, and another 4,700 were delivered to the homes of those unable to come in person. The number of meals served has increased from 30,555 in 1977 to 42,177 in 1982.

"USDA has helped us from the very first," says Red.

Since the center provides many services for the elderly, scores of volunteers are in evidence at every turn whether they are checking on eligibility for commodities distributed once a month for consumption at home or helping someone get to an appointment on time. C.L. Frost, the president of the Council on Aging since 1979, is no exception.

"I come in here every day that I'm not going fishing," he says in a way that one understands right away he is not fishing a lot. Frost agrees with Sunny Red that the key to the center's success is reaching out to many people. "You wouldn't get support," he says, "unless you had broad representation among all segments of the community."

For more information, contact:

Sunny Red, Director
Saline County Meals Program
for the Elderly
201 Jefferson
Benton, Arkansas 72015
Telephone: (501) 776-0255

*article by Yves Gerem
photos by Larry Rana*

The worst flooding in Tulsa, Oklahoma's history, touched off by a record rainfall on May 27, left 14 people dead, more than 80 injured and an estimated 2,000 homeless. Property damage throughout the flood area, which covered a third of Tulsa's 176 square miles, quickly mounted to millions of dollars. The disaster was qualified by Red Cross officials as being equal to that of a Gulf Coast hurricane.

Responding to the needs of disaster victims requires an ability to mobilize quickly, the capacity to be flexible, and the presence of mind to accomplish a task with increased efficiency under less-than-desirable and sometimes chaotic working conditions. The single most important ingredient in any successful disaster operation, though, is an enormous amount of coordination.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service is just one of many federal, state, and private agencies which may be involved in providing disaster relief. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is usually charged with the coordination responsibility.

"Our responsibility is to ensure that all agencies are doing what they know best and are supposed to do," says Brenda Johnson, FEMA's disaster assistance specialist. FEMA had no less than 150 staff members on site throughout the Tulsa disaster assistance operation.

The structure of a disaster assistance operation must be tailored to fit existing circumstances. No two operations will be exactly the same, but they will almost always be conducted in three distinct phases: (1) emergency relief (shelters, mass feeding, etc.); (2) intermediate relief (food stamps, Red Cross vouchers for cleaning supplies, etc.); and (3) rehabilitative relief (Small Business Administration loans, individual and family grants, unemployment assistance, etc.).

Food help in two stages

While the food distribution arm of FNS' disaster team handled the "emergency relief" phase of the Tulsa operation by moving in USDA commodities for mass feeding, Larry Carnes, section chief of the

Southwest region's family nutrition programs operation staff, orchestrated an information gathering campaign.

Members of Carnes' staff were in constant contact with Tulsa FNS field office and state agency personnel to determine how widespread the damage was and to get a grasp of the economic profile of the affected households.

"Our decision as to whether emergency food stamp assistance is needed is based on information from a variety of sources, including feedback from Red Cross and FEMA surveys," Carnes says.

On May 30, Carnes and his staff traveled to Tulsa for a first-hand look at the situation. The day before their arrival, six teams comprised of FEMA, civil defense, and state officials had begun surveying the damage.

Oklahoma state staff and FEMA workers mapped out areas they believed should be included in a disaster declaration. The Red Cross did extensive door-to-door surveying and mapped the areas they considered critical. Volunteers measured the depth of water inside houses and apartments. Anything over 12 inches was considered major damage.

Consolidation of the two maps showed that more than 4,600 families had been affected. Based on economic profiles of the households surveyed, it was estimated that 60 percent of those affected by the flood would qualify for emergency food stamp assistance. The average allotment per household was expected to be about \$178, and preliminary cost projections for the entire operation were \$380,000.

Declaration a necessary step

When all the necessary data had been gathered, Carnes sat down with John Hooper, Oklahoma Department of Human Services food stamp director, to discuss the pros and cons of making a food stamp disaster declaration. Carnes accepted Hooper's official request for a declaration and forwarded it to USDA headquarters for concurrence and final approval.

"A common misunderstanding is

in Tulsa Disaster Operation

that a Presidential disaster declaration automatically includes the go-ahead for emergency food stamp issuance," Carnes explains, "but they are actually two separate declarations." Final approval for a food stamp declaration is given by the Secretary of Agriculture and may be made with or without a Presidential declaration.

The Secretary approved Oklahoma's request on June 1, and at 1:00 p.m. on June 4 a federal disaster assistance center, which had been set up inside the exposition hall at the Tulsa Fairgrounds, opened its doors.

Aside from FNS and the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, some of the other agencies that were present to assist flood victims included the Veterans Administration, the Small Business Administration, the Salvation Army, and the Internal Revenue Service.

As the flood victims entered the door of the center, they surveyed an orderly maze of tables, chairs, paperwork, and people. In one corner of the huge room, there was a child care center.

After preliminary interviews, a FEMA map reader would determine whether applicants were categorically qualified for benefits. Did they reside in a designated disaster area at the time of the flood? Did they suffer flood damage? Did they meet other general eligibility criteria for

disaster assistance? Once applicants made the rounds and came to the food stamp area, about 20 certification staffers were ready to talk with them.

"We identified the problem, then verified the residency," says Mitch Rowe from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, who was in charge of the screening process. "Each agency there had different eligibility criteria, so the coordinators met once a day to iron out wrinkles in the flow of applicants. The last thing these people needed was to wait longer than they already had."

Process is streamlined

The entire process in a disaster operation is streamlined in comparison to the regular procedures at a food stamp certification office. The applicant is screened for eligibility, the amount of benefits determined, and food stamps issued—all on the spot. He or she may have to talk to three or four people, because of specialized duties, but the entire process takes only a few minutes.

"Food stamps are something tangible these people are able to get before confronting their misery again," says Jack Stewart, state coordinator for the Department of Human Services. "It sure cheers them up a little."

By the time the disaster assist-

ance center closed its doors on June 13, a total of 2,153 households representing approximately 6,200 people had received food stamp benefits worth \$376,000. About 50 Department of Human Services employees had worked 12-hour days with no extra pay. And, all the while, their regular work, back at the office, was piling up.

"You don't even think about what motivates you," one worker said. "I know what these people are going through. Two years ago, my home burned."

"The ideal situation," says Carnes, "is to get in there quickly, be responsive to those who need help, and get right back out. The longer you linger, the more you increase the program's vulnerability to abuse."

"As the number of applications drops off," he continues, "you need to get the word out that the center will be closing soon." This is usually done through a press release. Media releases are important up front, too," says Carnes.

"You have to let people know that help is available and give them an idea of how the program works. You also have to make it clear that this is a special emergency program that may be able to serve people who ordinarily would not qualify for food stamps. It's also very important, as a deterrent, to publicize the consequences of fraudulently obtaining benefits."

"To issue food stamps in a disaster situation is one of the most rewarding experiences a human services worker can have," Carnes says. "Unfortunately, there is still a lot of work to be done after the emergency centers close. Then comes the process of making sure everything was done right."

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Several agencies worked together to assist victims of the Tulsa floods. Pictured here are map readers from the Federal Emergency Manage-

ment Agency (FEMA). Staff from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services were in charge of screening applicants for food stamps.

article by Kay Blakley
photo by Yves Gerem

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